Articles from the Stevens Point Journal

August 12, 2005
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**Little Plover River dries up**

*Heather Clark (spj)*
*Staff*

BY HEATHER CLARK

Journal staff

Years of research suggesting the **Little Plover River** would dry up became reality this week.

University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point professor Bryant Browne, some of his students and some recent graduates visited the **river** this week to begin a one-year study of how the **river** works, where flow comes in and where it exits. What they discovered surprised them.

Stretches of dry **river** bed greeted them, and dead trout - and other aquatic life - floated in shallow pockets of water near tree roots.

"For a long time we've expected this to occur, but it always comes up on you faster than you expect it to," Browne said. "We had no idea this was going to happen this year. We wanted to find out more about the **river**'s dynamics. We knew we needed to do more (research)."

Browne pulled together some student researchers (some of whom were hired by the university for research this summer) to head out and install a well system to monitor the flow. The wells, PVC piping about the size of large straws, were installed at various depths in the **river** and flags pinpointed the edge of the **river** in the beds.

"It's completely different than last fall," said Jeremy Wyss of Black **River** Falls. A May graduate and former student of Browne, he was hired as a researcher this summer. "We were just going to map out how the water enters and leaves the stream ... and we realized the area we were mapping, the water wasn't flowing."

Browne and his students have been studying the **river**, especially the stretch about two-tenths of a mile from Eisenhower Avenue, for the past 13 years, he said. His results indicated that each year, the **river** was taxed more and more by farmers pulling from the stream to irrigate their fields and **Plover** drawing water for its municipality.

"If we didn't have the competition for water, this would be going pretty well, even in drought conditions," he said. "I've never seen it like this. Historically this has never happened."

Tuesday night's thunderstorms and Thursday's rain brought life back into the **river**, but minimally. Scuds, **less** than a half-inch long side-swimming invertebrates, were about the only organisms left to see, and some of them were floating in the water, too.

"There should be vegetation all over here and there is none," said Kyle Heimerl, a senior at the university. "It's drying all the way down to the bridge. We found just two pools (Tuesday)."

The trout minnows and shellfish in those were transferred to larger aquatic areas, Heimerl said.
Despite the nearly 1.5 inches of rainfall Tuesday night, as the day wore on Wednesday, the **river** showed signs of drying again. Within a five-hour period - by 3 p.m. - the **river** receded 50 feet per hour. So dry patches between areas where water was present and flowing increased, they said. No fish swam in areas typically thick with trout and deemed anglers' favorites, Browne said.
Local, regional and state officials were contacted and Browne hopes to work together to find a solution to at **least** slow the process.
In the meantime, the student researchers will continue their work monitoring the flow. Already they have identified areas in which the groundwater and runoff enters the **river** and areas that it is being pulled from for other resources.
They will take samples from each of three depths, 5-feet, 3-feet and 1 foot, and then test them for various chemicals and compounds such as nitrates, chloride and minerals.
"What this certain area will reflect is what is going on in the farmers' fields," said Cory Wallschlaeger, a junior.
The data will combine with that collected previously to further indicate any patterns occurring, Browne said, and may help in the process of determining what to do.
"This is going to become a reoccurrence," he said. "This was a beautiful resource. If were going to keep (it), now is the time for political action."
Clark can be reached at 345-2248 and hclarkcwnews.net.

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August 17, 2005
**Section:** Local
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**Village, DNR keep eye on Little Plover River**

*Heather Clark (spj)*
*Staff*

Efforts made to preserve trout population

BY HEATHER CLARK
Journal staff
The trout population and **Little Plover River** life span is not in a crisis situation, according to a state official.
But given the recent drought, the system should be more carefully watched, other officials said.

"It is not unusual for stream flows to decrease in the summer, but the de-watering of this Class 1 trout stream should never have happened," said Bill Pielsticker, chairman of Wisconsin Trout Unlimited. "We must take immediate steps to ensure this will not occur again."

A group of local, regional and state officials, including municipal leaders and conservationists, met late last week to walk a portion of the **river** and examine dry **river** bed and dead fish, first noticed Aug. 8. University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point students and workers that day had discovered the sections of dry **river** bed and pockets of stagnant water filled with dead trout and invertebrates.

"It's partly a byproduct of development, but it's been coming for a long time," said Tom Meronek, fish biologist with the state Department of Natural Resources in Wausau, which covers Portage and Marathon counties. "**Little Plover** is a relatively delicate system. It's a small **river**, and it's not real long.

"When you get into situations where the water table is down and there's a drought plus the municipal and agricultural pumping, gardening and grass watering, it takes its toll on a **little** stream like that," he said.

This is the first time in history that the **Little Plover River** has shown stretches of dried-up **river** bed, despite two other droughts on record in the late 1970s and in 1988-89. Municipal conditions such as **Plover**'s well systems have changed since then.

Village of **Plover** officials were the first to make some adjustments, they said this week, shifting some of their municipal pumping to a well field a short distance from the **river**.

"We're certainly concerned about it," Water System Manager Dave Fritsch said. "It's an issue. ... We're in a drought, and there's a lot of pumping going on by all means. We did not see the draw down at our wells. Had we had known this a **little** sooner, we would've certainly changed our pumping strategy."

**Plover** has reduced the percentage of its water pumping from 70 percent of its water from the well field near the **river** to 40 percent, he said. If need be, he said, the village could shift the entire load to the well field further away, though that would not be ideal. The well field two miles south of the **river** was chosen specifically because of its impact on the **river** when it was installed in the late '90s, he said.

The village also has a number of high-capacity well owners it is in contact with to continue discussions on protecting the **river** resources, he said.

The village's action and recent rains buoyed the **river** close to regular height early this week, though a view of the **river** Tuesday afternoon yielded no fish in sight. That does not mean the dried-up beds last week rendered the trout extinct, Meronek said.

"You may not see fish out there, but they're out there," he said. "We probably lost some isolated pockets of fish, I'm sure, and we lost some invertebrates, but there are still fish that are holding upstream, holding downstream."

DNR maintains survey records from UWSP students and staff annually in the fall and will continue to do so this year, Meronek said, but it also is possible the DNR will go at itself.

"I don't suspect the population has been decimated," he said. "I think it can be recovered at this point. If it keeps drying up and we keep losing pockets, we're going

to have a problem. That will take a toll on the population. With this one dry up, I'm hoping it will recover fast."
That is good news to trout fishermen, locally and those who occasionally return to the area.
"When I was student at Point back in the '70s, this stream was a rehabilitation project, and it was so gratifying to see this stream once again support a healthy population of brook trout," said Dale MacDonald, who now lives in LaGrange Highlands, Ill.
"I have many fond memories of catching brook trout in that **little** gem of a creek," he said.
Additional plans include evaluating interest in forming a Friends of the **Little Plover River** organization and monitoring the situation through a group as well.
The group last week also expressed interest in seeing the UWSP data forwarded to the state Groundwater Advisory Committee for review.
Clark can be reached at 345-2248 and hclarkcwnews.net.

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September 1, 2005
**Section:** Local
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**Little Plover River reduced to a trickle**

*Heather Clark*

BY HEATHER CLARK

Journal staff
Bob Konopacky remembers the days when he could plunk his children into an inner tube at the Springville dam and they would shoot down the cascading water of the stream running through his property.
Now, more than 30 years later, there's barely enough flowing water to call it a stream, he said.
"It's the second year in a row nothing's coming over the dam," said Konopacky, 3010 Springville Drive. "It's really sad. There are pools of trout swimming around and they've got no place to go.
"I don't know what the answer is," he said.
Konopacky was among about 50 people gathered at **Plover** Municipal Center on Wednesday night to discuss trends on the **Little Plover River**, including how groundwater, streams, wells and pumping play a role in its vitality, and what to do next to sustain it.

The **Little Plover River** runs into Springville Pond and ultimately at **least** in the past pours over the dam and into the streams running through Konopacky's property, winding its way to the Wisconsin **River**. This year, there is standing water in some areas and the waterway has dropped to a trickle.

It is one of the extending effects of the **Little Plover River** running dry in a 1.3 mile stretch further upstream earlier this month.

After a more than 90-minute period of data, presentations, discussions and question and answers Wednesday night, the group gathered in **Plover** started tossing out suggestions for working on the problem.

Some argued that putting in dams that had been removed in the last decade would raise the groundwater table. Altering well pumping and irrigation strategies also popped up. There also were ideas of somehow holding back water from wet springs or high snowfall seasons or even pumping water back into the **river** when the drought periods come through.

"I think those are all ideas that need to be examined," said Dan Mahoney, **Plover** village administrator.

The village already has been proactive in protecting the **river**, Mahoney said, in some ways intentionally and in other by luck, like locating the third municipal well about 2.5 miles from the **river** and not requiring a municipal sewer system respectively.

Wisconsin Rural Water Association has its hand in the action as well, having for six months been working with the village on a source water protection plan, part of which includes conservation education and bringing two monitoring stations back up and running to clearly and immediately gather data and document the flow and other aspects of the **river**.

It is a big first step for the area, one that also found people in attendance gathering to form a Friends of the **Little Plover River** group and organize future meetings to further investigate why the **river** went dry and what that exactly means.

"If that stream goes dry, even for a short period, there are collateral results," said Bryant Browne, a University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point hydrology professor whose students discovered the dry stretches Aug. 9 along with pools of dead fish.

"There is a flag here," said George Kraft, professor of water resources at UWSP. "We do some investigation and we either find it's real and we do something about it or we lose the **Little Plover River**."